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O 251303Z JUN 08  
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8332

UNCLAS COLOMBO 000619

(C O R R E C T E D C O P Y) CHANGING DATES IN TEXT

SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

FOR DS/IP/SCA, DS/IP/WMD, DS/CC, M/MED, SA/INS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: ASEC CASC PTER AMED CE

SUBJECT: CLOSING CAC AT AMEMBASSY COLOMBO DUE TO WHITE  
POWDER INCIDENT CLOSES AMEMBASSY COLOMBO FOR NORMAL  
OPERATIONS

¶1. (SBU) Summary: At approximately 1000 hrs. local on June 25, 2008, RSO Colombo received a report that a mailroom clerk had opened an envelope containing a white, powdery substance while conducting a secondary screening of the envelope in post's mail screening room. Further inquiries revealed that someone hand delivered the envelope at approximately 1430 hr. on June 24 to the guard post at the Compound Access Control (CAC) inspection area. Guard personnel kept the envelope in the CAC until mailroom personnel collected it and took it to the secondary mail screening facility. After gathering the basic facts, RSO Colombo notified the duty officer for DS/IP/SPC/WMD, who instructed the RSO to close the CAC until such time as lab analysis reveals the nature of the substance. Consequently, AmEmbassy Colombo was forced to suspend regular business, closing the Chancery to all but official visitors and emergency American Citizen Services. End summary.

¶2. (SBU) RSO Colombo learned of a white powder incident at AmEmbassy Colombo at approximately 1000 hrs. local on June 25, 2008. Subsequent queries revealed that a mailroom clerk had been conducting a secondary screening of a suspicious envelope when, upon opening the envelope, a white, powdery substance spilled from it. The clerk had contained the envelope within a sealed glove box inside post's mail screening room, which is located in an outbuilding, separate from the Chancery. Therefore, the Chancery was not affected.

¶3. (SBU) RSO Colombo interviewed mailroom personnel and CAC guards and discovered that the envelope had arrived on June 24 at approximately 1430 hrs. (i.e. the day before the mailroom clerk opened it). Guard staff said that someone hand delivered the envelope and signed their log book to acknowledge delivery. The subject who delivered the envelope, which was addressed to "The Ambassador," signed his name "B. SATHYOJAATHAN." However, the guards had not obtained any other biographical information. The guards checked the envelope with X-ray equipment and set it aside on a desk, where it remained until mailroom staff collected it and took it to the secondary screening room. The envelope could have sat on the desk in the CAC from one to two hours. The mailroom clerk who retrieved the envelope took it directly to the screening room and deposited it in the glove box. A mailroom supervisor opened it the following day (June 25), keeping it contained in the glove box, as per Embassy protocol. RSO note - Guard and mailroom personnel are trained to detect suspicious mail. All of the staff involved in this incident recognized that this particular delivery was suspicious, taking the proper steps to inspect it with X-ray equipment and set it aside for secondary inspections.

¶4. (SBU) Upon gathering these basic facts, RSO notified the DS Command Center and requested to speak to the DS/IPC/SPC/WMD duty officer. The duty officer instructed the

RSO to close the CAC immediately, which the RSO did at 1100 hrs. However, the CAC contains the majority of the devices (metal detectors, X-ray equipment and Itemizer machine) that the guards use to properly screen visitors. The only way for visitors to enter the compound on foot is via a entrance in the perimeter wall. This entrance cannot serve as a CAC because it leads directly onto the compound and has no mantrap capabilities. The guards will have to use handheld metal detectors to screen visitors and there is no way to contain anyone who poses a potential risk to the Embassy. In order to reduce the number of pedestrians that guard personnel will have to screen, as well as minimize possible security risks, Embassy Colombo has closed to routine business. The Consular Section will provide American Citizens' Services on an emergency basis, but has canceled visa interviews until further notice. Visitors arriving for business meetings will have access to the compound. Post has issued a Warden Message and Public Announcement to this effect, as cleared by the Operations Center. This closure will remain in effect until such time as DS/WMD directs RSO Colombo to open the CAC, and this decision is contingent upon determining the true nature of the white powder.

¶15. (SBU) Post's Chemical and Biological response team collected samples of the powder in accordance with WMD protocols. The Chem/Bio team collected the samples in two vials - one for local analysis and the other for delivery to the Centers for Disease Control, Rapid Response Advanced Technology Laboratory. Post has utilized the local laboratory in the past for several similar events and the results should be reliable. RSO personnel, working through the Sri Lanka Police Service (SLPS), will the deliver the sample as soon as possible on June 26.

¶16. (SBU) RSO has not been able to personally inspect the POWDER INCIDENT CLOSES AMEMBASSY COLOMBO FOR NORMAL OPERATIONS

envelope and will not do so unless the results of the laboratory analysis reveal a benign substance. Consequently, RSO has no investigative leads to report at this time. However, digital video recorders capture images from the CAC, and the subject who delivered the letter should appear on the recordings. RSO will coordinate an investigation into the incident with the SLPS and report developments septel.

7.(U) Point of contact for this message is Michael V. Perkins, Regional Security Officer, who may be contacted at 94.11.249.8756, 94.11.249.8888 (MSG Post One after regular business hours), and via the unclassified and classified email systems.

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